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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: "CELEBRATION OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY" UNITES DIVERSE CROWD

¶11. Summary: On November 4, 2008, Mission Maseru hosted an election-night reception at the Chief of Mission residence (CMR). The evening's theme was "A Celebration of American Democracy". All Mission staff members worked at the event, which was attended by over 300 guests. There was a diverse group of invitees, from high-level government officials to local university students and Peace Corps volunteers. Local press attended, including representatives from the country's only television network. End Summary.

Mission Maseru celebrates American Democracy

¶12. In keeping with the theme "A Celebration of American Democracy", the CMR was decorated with red, white and blue, and a lot of Americana. Two poster shows from IIP framed the podium and the entrance to the festivities: "The Road to Equality: How American Women Won the Vote" and "Principles of Democracy". Embassy personnel gave away red, white, and blue necklaces as well as Lesotho / USA flag pins. Both giveaways were extremely popular. EJournals, publications, and one-pagers from IIP were placed at tables around the CMR. By the end of the night, none of this material was left. That includes 40 copies of each one pager, 60 copies of "The Candidates" and "The Electoral College" EJournals, and about 50 copies of "Elections in Brief" and "Democracy in Brief", as well as bookmarks highlighting the America.gov website.

Ambassador Hosts Record Crowd

¶13. In typical Lesotho fashion, Mission Maseru received only twenty responses before the big event. However, when the evening was over, more than 300 people had attended. Among the attendees were the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations; Health and Social Welfare; Finance and Development Planning; Labour and Employment; and the Minister to the Prime Minister's Office; as well as the Speaker of the National Assembly and representatives from all diplomatic missions, including the Libyan Embassy. The Minister of Finance commented on the variety of attendees. He stated that he was very happy to see so many young faces at the reception. Mission Maseru made an effort with this reception to reach out to young, mid- and entry-level government officials. To this end, thirty students from the National University were invited along with their teachers in the fields of law, political science / public administration, and development studies.

Democratic values praised, biographies enjoyed

¶14. The program for the event included remarks by the Ambassador and three video presentations. The video presentations were shown on a massive screen in the back corner of the Ambassador's property. As guests were arriving, they had the opportunity to view the America.gov video: "Elections 2008: volume three", provided by IIP. Next, the Ambassador delivered remarks which focused on the unique and historic nature of this election; the importance of democratic values in American society and how they

have helped build good relations with other nations of the world, including Lesotho; and the enduring legacy of humanitarian and economic aid for which President Bush will be remembered in Africa.

¶5. After the Ambassador's speech, biographies of the candidates, produced by "The Biography Channel" and provided to post by Video Acquisitions, were screened. The event's MC flipped a coin to choose which candidate's biography would be broadcast first. The very pro-Obama Basotho crowd displayed slight displeasure when McCain's biography won the coin toss, but this encouraged them to stay through for both videos. A very large group of people, both sitting and standing, watched the videos in their entirety. Many attendees commented on the festive feel of this "under the stars" screening. When the videos ended, the crowd went home, hopefully to log on to the america.gov web chat, or the Voice of America website, both of which were publicized during the MC's remarks.

Celebrating with a diverse audience a success

¶6. Comment: This reception was extremely well-received by the diverse crowd. Many guests commented on the unusual mix of guests. With the Department's focus on getting the message out to younger, broader, and deeper audiences, this kind of event with a guest list that includes University students and Government Ministers, can reach new contacts and have a great impact in this small country. The festive atmosphere, despite the seriousness of the content, was a welcome change from the typical speeches and lectures. Mission Maseru feels that this kind of event can serve an extremely vital Public Diplomacy function here in Maseru. We plan to hold such events again, and anticipate continued high attendance. End comment.

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